

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 002671

SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR EUR/WE: LEVIN; EUR/ERA; DRL/IRF

E.O. 12958 N/A

TAGS: [PREL PHUM VT](#)

SUBJECT: POPE SEEKS TO SPEED UP UNITY WITH ORTHODOX

SENSITIVE

REF. VATICAN 1171

-----  
SUMMARY  
-----

1.(SBU) POPE JOHN PAUL II USED A HIGH PROFILE, INTERNATIONALLY TELEVISED VATICAN CELEBRATION WITH THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE BARTHOLOMEW I TO MAKE NEW EFFORTS FOR UNITY WITH ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS. BARTHOLOMEW I, THE "FIRST AMONG EQUALS" AMONG ORTHODOX PATRIARCHS, JOINED THE POPE IN SYMBOLIC AND CONCRETE ACTS THAT AUGER WELL FOR CONTINUED RECONCILIATION BETWEEN THE TWO CHURCHES. THOUGH OUR VATICAN CONTACTS TOLD US THEY VIEW BARTHOLOMEW'S INFLUENCE UPON PATRIARCHS LESS EAGER FOR RECONCILIATION SUCH AS RUSSIA'S ALEXY II TO BE UNCERTAIN, THEY WELCOMED HIS GESTURES AT RECONCILIATION. IN PERHAPS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT OF THE VISIT, THE TWO CHURCHES AGREED TO RESTART A THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION THAT HAD BEEN HALTED FOUR YEARS AGO. WITH THIS AND OTHER IMPROVEMENTS IN THE RELATIONSHIP, BARTHOLOMEW'S VISIT SIGNIFIED A STEP TOWARDS UNITY, EVEN IF FORMIDABLE OBSTACLES REMAIN. END SUMMARY.

-----  
PATRIARCH JOINS HIGH PROFILE CEREMONY  
-----

2.(U) IN A CEREMONY FRAUGHT WITH SYMBOLISM, POPE JOHN PAUL II AND ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE BARTHOLOMEW I SAT TOGETHER, SHARED A SERMON AND PROFESSED THEIR COMMON FAITH BEFORE A CONGREGATION OF SOME 15,000 GATHERED IN VATICAN CITY FOR ROME'S PATRONAL FEAST OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL. BARTHOLOMEW ATTENDED THE MASS TO COMMEMORATE THE FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE HISTORIC ENCOUNTER BETWEEN POPE PAUL VI (1963-78) AND THEN ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH ATHENAGORUS THAT INITIATED A PROCESS OF RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN THE TWO CHURCHES THAT FOR SOME TEN CENTURIES HAD BEEN BITTER RIVALS.

-----  
VISIT COMES AMIDST DISPUTES  
-----

3.(U) BARTHOLOMEW'S VISIT WAS A WELCOME SHOT IN THE ARM FOR RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO CHURCHES. CURRENT DIALOGUE IS BOGGED DOWN IN DISPUTES BETWEEN CATHOLIC AND ORTHODOX CHURCHES IN RUSSIA, ROMANIA AND OTHER EASTERN EUROPEAN STATES (REFTEL). CHARGES OF CATHOLIC PROSELYTISM FROM THE ORTHODOX, ESPECIALLY RUSSIAN ORTHODOX PATRIARCH ALEXY II, HAVE ALSO KEPT THE TWO SIDES AT ARM'S LENGTH. THE GREATEST MANIFESTATION OF THESE DIFFICULTIES IS PERHAPS THE UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH'S BID TO HAVE THE VATICAN NAME IT A PATRIARCHATE -- SOMETHING BITTERLY OPPOSED BY THE ORTHODOX. AS A CONSEQUENCE, OFFICIAL THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL HAS NOT TAKEN PLACE SINCE 2000. PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW SAID DURING HIS VISIT THAT NON-THEOLOGICAL OBSTACLES TO UNITY SHOULD BE RESOLVED IMMEDIATELY SO THAT BOTH CHURCHES CAN FOCUS ON THEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS. THE POPE CLEARLY AGREES.

-----  
"SOMEONE WE CAN TALK TO..."  
-----

14. (SBU) JOZEF MAJ, A POLISH JESUIT WHO IS POINT MAN FOR ORTHODOX RELATIONS IN THE HOLY SEE'S PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, TOLD US THE VATICAN WAS VERY PLEASED WITH THE VISIT. BARTHOLOMEW IS "SOMEONE WE CAN TALK TO," HE SAID. THE PATRIARCH STUDIED FOR SOME YEARS IN ROME, AND UNDERSTANDS THE LANGUAGE, MAJ SAID. MAJ MEANT NOT SIMPLY BARTHOLOMEW'S ITALIAN, THOUGH THE PATRIARCH IMPRESSED THE CONGREGATION AT ST. PETER'S WITH HIS SMOOTH PRONUNCIATION, BUT ALSO THE LANGUAGE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. BARTHOLOMEW MAY NOT AGREE WITH US ON ALL THE DISPUTED MATTERS, MAJ SAID, BUT HE "KNOWS WHERE WE'RE COMING FROM." THIS IS NOT THE CASE WITH SOME OTHER ORTHODOX LEADERS, HE SAID. THE BACKGROUND AND PERSPECTIVE OF HARDER-LINE PRELATES FROM DIFFERENT REGIONS LEADS THEM

TO REGARD THE ROMAN CHURCH AS MUCH MORE FOREIGN THAN DOES BARTHOLOMEW. THE FIRST STEP IN DIALOGUE IS TO KNOW AND UNDERSTAND YOUR INTERLOCUTOR, MAJ SAID. ACCORDING TO THE VATICAN, BARTHOLOMEW GETS IT.

-----  
BARTHOLOMEW'S INFLUENCE  
-----

15. (SBU) MAJ EMPHASIZED BARTHOLOMEW'S IMPORTANCE IN THE VATICAN 00002671 002 OF 002

OTHER CHURCHES HAVE SPRUNG. STILL, HE RECOGNIZED THAT HIS INFLUENCE OVER OTHER PATRIARCHS LIKE ALEXY WAS NOT GREAT, SINCE THE NATIONAL ORTHODOX CHURCHES RELISH THEIR INDEPENDENCE. FURTHER, SOME SENSITIVE ISSUES SUCH AS THE STATUS OF THE UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND CHARGES OF ROME'S POACHING ON ORTHODOX TURF HIT HOME EVEN HARDER WITH THE RUSSIANS THAN THEY DO WITH BARTHOLOMEW. ON THE OTHER HAND, MAJ CONCLUDED, SOMEONE HAS TO LEAD, AND THE SYMBOLS AND CONCRETE STEPS TAKEN DURING THE VISIT LED HIM TO BE OPTIMISTIC.

-----  
POSITIVE STEPS  
-----

6.(SBU) ONE OF THESE CONCRETE STEPS IS THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE TWO CHURCHES. THESE TALKS WERE FIRST UNDERTAKEN IN 1979, BUT WERE DISCONTINUED WHEN MEETINGS IN BALTIMORE IN 2000 ENDED IN DISPUTE OVER THE STATUS OF THE EASTERN-RITE CATHOLIC CHURCHES (SUCH AS THE UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH) AND ON THE ROLE OF THE PAPACY. MAJ TOLD US THE RE-ESTABLISHED TALKS WOULD INCLUDE MEMBERS OF ALL ORTHODOX CHURCHES. ALEXY'S ALLEGED INTRANSIGENCE NOTWITHSTANDING, MAJ SAID THAT RUSSIAN ORTHODOX REPRESENTATIVES HAD BEEN AMONG THE MOST CONSTRUCTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN PAST COMMISSIONS.

-----  
A CHURCH FOR THE ORTHODOX  
-----

17. (SBU) AS A FURTHER SYMBOL OF THE RENEWED COMMITMENT TO COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO CHURCHES, POPE JOHN PAUL II ALSO MADE A GIFT OF A ROMAN CHURCH TO THE LOCAL GREEK ORTHODOX COMMUNITY. [NOTE: A SIMILAR GIFT TO THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX COMMUNITY SEVERAL YEARS AGO WAS REFUSED BY THE RUSSIANS. END NOTE.] ACCORDING TO MAJ, THIS WAS NO SMALL GESTURE IN AN ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH POSSESSION OF CHURCHES AND RELATIVE TERRITORY IS HOTLY CONTESTED. THE POPE'S GENEROSITY WAS ALSO A SIGN TO THE ORTHODOX THAT THE PRESENCE OF THEIR COMMUNITY IN CATHOLIC ROME IS NOT A THREAT, BUT RATHER AN EXPRESSION OF THE RICH DIVERSITY OF THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION -- A POSITION CATHOLICS WOULD LIKE TO SEE RECIPROCATED IN ORTHODOX TERRITORY.

-----  
ANTI-TERRORISM AND DIALOGUE WITH ISLAM  
-----

18. (U) AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE PATRIARCH'S VISIT, HE AND THE POPE ALSO ISSUED A JOINT STATEMENT PROMISING TO COOPERATE ON EFFORTS TO TACKLE TERRORISM, RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE, AND "ATTACKS AGAINST HUMAN LIFE." FOCUSING SPECIFICALLY ON EUROPE, THE TWO SPIRITUAL LEADERS SAID THEIR CHURCHES SHOULD COMBINE THEIR EFFORTS TO CONSTRUCT A REAL DIALOGUE WITH ISLAM, AIMING TO COMBAT MISTRUST AND HATRED BY ELIMINATING "INDIFFERENCE AND MUTUAL IGNORANCE."

-----  
COMMENT: DREAM FOR A UNITED EUROPE STILL ALIVE  
-----

9.(SBU) THE HOLY SEE'S RECEPTION OF BARTHOLOMEW WAS PART OF THE VATICAN'S BROAD EUROPEAN STRATEGY TO CEMENT ECCLESIASTICAL ALLIANCES TO MATCH THE POLITICAL CONNECTIONS THAT ARE FAST-DEVELOPING IN TODAY'S EUROPE. THIS IS PARTICULARLY URGENT GIVEN THE FAILURE OF THE HOLY SEE'S INTENSE LOBBYING TO ENSURE A REFERENCE TO THE CONTINENT'S CHRISTIAN HERITAGE IN THE NEW EUROPEAN CONSTITUTION. EVER SINCE HE ASSUMED THE PAPACY, JOHN PAUL II HAS BEEN DRIVEN BY A FERVENT DESIRE FOR A UNITED EUROPE FOUNDED ON CHRISTIAN VALUES, STRETCHING FROM THE ATLANTIC TO THE URALS. IN THE POPE'S WORDS, HE WANTS TO SEE A EUROPE BREATHING WITH TWO LUNGS -- WESTERN AND EASTERN, CATHOLIC AND ORTHODOX. REMAINING OBSTACLES NOTWITHSTANDING, BARTHOLOMEW'S VISIT KEPT A GLIMMER OF HOPE ALIVE FOR THE REALIZATION OF THAT VISION. END COMMENT.

MARTIN

NNNN

